

GCE A Level Examiners' Report

Sociology
A Level
Summer 2025

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Introduction

Our Principal examiners' report provides valuable feedback on the recent assessment series. It has been written by our Principal Examiners and Principal Moderators after the completion of marking and moderation, and details how candidates have performed in each component.

This report opens with a summary of candidates' performance, including the assessment objectives/skills/topics/themes being tested, and highlights the characteristics of successful performance and where performance could be improved. It then looks in detail at each unit, pinpointing aspects that proved challenging to some candidates and suggesting some reasons as to why that might be.¹

The information found in this report provides valuable insight for practitioners to support their teaching and learning activity. We would also encourage practitioners to share this document – in its entirety or in part – with their learners to help with exam preparation, to understand how to avoid pitfalls and to add to their revision toolbox.

Further support

Document	Description	Link
Professional Learning / CPD	Eduqas offers an extensive programme of online and face-to-face Professional Learning events. Access interactive feedback, review example candidate responses, gain practical ideas for the classroom and put questions to our dedicated team by registering for one of our events here.	https://www.eduqas.co.uk/home/professional-learning/
Past papers	Access the bank of past papers for this qualification, including the most recent assessments. Please note that we do not make past papers available on the public website until 12 months after the examination.	Portal by WJEC or on the Eduqas subject page
Grade boundary information	Grade boundaries are the minimum number of marks needed to achieve each grade. For linear specifications, a single grade is awarded for the subject, rather than for each component that contributes towards the overall grade. Grade boundaries are published on results day.	For unitised specifications click here: Results and Grade Boundaries and PRS (eduqas.co.uk)

¹ Please note that where overall performance on a question/question part was considered good, with no particular areas to highlight, these questions have not been included in the report.

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Executive Summary

All three components were of a similar level of difficulty as previous series but candidate performance, on the whole, was a little weaker.

Component 1, which centres on socialisation and culture, comprises a compulsory Section A and optional Sections B and C, from which candidates select one topic in each. Candidates achieved higher standards in Section A compared to 2024 with both questions 1.1 and 1.2 seeing slight increases in the mean mark. In the more extended questions, the strongest responses demonstrated higher order analytical and evaluative skills, with essays that were well-structured, coherent, and clearly focused on the question. However, a number of candidates submitted very brief essays, particularly in Section C, which significantly affected their overall marks. This was often due to poor time management, with some spending too long on Section A and leaving insufficient time for their second extended response. Additionally, where questions required use of the item, many candidates failed to do so effectively, which limited the marks awarded.

A key area for improvement remains AO3 skills, which involve maintaining a discursive and evaluative tone throughout essay responses. Candidates are expected to support their arguments with empirical and sociological evidence, and centres are encouraged to incorporate contemporary research where appropriate and ensure that evidence is precisely linked to the context of question.

Component 2 assesses research methods, with all three assessment objectives covered across the paper. Question 1 consists of three parts and requires reference to the item in each, with sociological studies only needed in Q1.3. Question 2 does not require item reference. While the two five-mark questions were in line with previous years, Q1.3 was notably weaker, as many candidates misunderstood the requirement to include studies using multiple methods. Instead, they listed different types of methods, failing to grasp the holistic nature of mixed-method research, which led to a drop of nearly 2 marks in the average mark for this question. Question 2 responses showed some improvement in contextualising answers to the brief, but many still lacked the methodological language outlined in the specification, resulting in basic responses.

In Component 3, candidates showed better understanding of the demands of Question 1.1, particularly in distinguishing between difference and inequality. However, across other 20-mark questions, insufficient use of sociological evidence often restricted responses to mid-level mark bands. Over-reliance on single theorists, such as Murray or Marx, was evident in Questions 1.2 and 4.2, which limited access to higher marks. Teaching should encourage broader theoretical engagement and ensure case studies like the Macpherson Report are used for their evidential value rather than providing a narrative of the Stephen Lawrence case.

Evaluation across the paper was sometimes superficial or descriptive. The most successful responses integrated critical evaluation of different perspectives and evidence. Future teaching should focus on developing robust evaluative arguments, helping candidates move beyond simple contrasts to demonstrate a deeper understanding of the complexities within each topic.

In all three components there is the need to build and develop AO3 skills. Juxtaposing alternative views or theories is not sufficient to move up the mark bands. Other areas for improvement include the effective use of sociological evidence, particularly in Components 1 and 3 and the need to contextualise responses where it is required by the question must be adhered to if candidates are to optimise AO2 marks.

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COMPONENT 1 – SOCIALISATION AND CULTURE

Overview of the Component

Component 1 focuses on socialisation and culture and includes three sections: Section A being compulsory and Sections B and C containing options from which candidates select one in each. The demand of the assessment was in line with that of previous series.

The very best answers demonstrated the higher order skills of analysis and evaluation most effectively and many essays were well structured, logical and clearly focussed on the specifics of the question.

There were however some very brief responses to essay questions and where this was the case, it had a significant impact on the total mark for the paper. This was most evident in the second of the extended essays (Section C: Education, Media or Religion). Some candidates seemed to have not managed their time effectively and had excessively long answers for culture questions in Section A, and incomplete or very short answers for the second of their optional questions. Use of the item, where required by the question, was often not done effectively which affected the marks awarded to responses.

A key area of development continues to be AO3 skills which enable candidates to maintain a discursive and evaluative tone in the essay questions. In addition to this, the use of empirical and sociological evidence to illustrate and support discussion is expected across the range of topics and centres are encouraged to explore contemporary research where available, and to ensure the evidence is linked precisely to the specifics of the question asked.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- 1.1** Most candidates were able to demonstrate some knowledge of the meaning of values. However, a significant number were unsure and offered very generalised definitions and some defined norms instead. Many failed to utilise the item for their answer. As a result, a significant number of candidates failed to score full marks for this question. The mean mark was 3.7.
- 1.2** Most candidates were able to identify at least two agents of socialisation and link these to expected ways of behaving. Consequently, these candidates were able to access band 4 marks. Most candidates wrote about family, media or education. The best answers referred to processes such as canalisation, manipulation, verbal appellations, imitation, sanctions, role modelling and peer pressure, showing a clear understanding of how the selected agents of socialisation help people to learn culture. However, a significant minority failed to explain the processes of how these agents teach us the expected ways of behaving. Use of the item varied between candidates; some made good use of the item and used the content or directly quoted. Some candidates seemed to ignore the item and seemed to rely upon a memorised answer which lacked relevance to the specific question.

Section B

Families and Households was the more popular of the two options with approximately two-thirds opting for the topic compared to one-third who opted for Youth Cultures.

- 2.1** Many candidates were able to offer at least two reasons for the increase in people living alone, although some seemed to get confused and write about single / lone parents.

A number of candidates addressed this by age groups and thought about differing reasons between young people, middle-aged people and older people including issues such as life expectancy, divorce, and changing beliefs about choosing to live alone. Some candidates seemed less confident about the need for evidence in this response and described trends less specifically.

- 2.2** The most complex, and well rewarded responses discussed Radical Psychiatry and the sociology of childhood and showed a wide range of knowledge of the specification. Most candidates used domestic abuse statistics and Marxism, although the complexity of Marxist views of the family varied widely. Most evaluated with Functionalist and New Right views of the family. Some candidates seemed more confident on positive views of the family, which didn't always address the question of why the family has a negative effect on individuals.

To access the highest mark bands candidates needed to demonstrate detailed understanding of the debate with reference to key theories/writers and evidence. The best essays maintained an evaluative tone throughout and were clearly focused on the debate in question. Descriptive accounts of different ideas were not rewarded with high marks for AO3 and sometimes lacked AO1 complexity if appearing list-like and lacking detail.

- 2.3** This was an open essay where candidates could use a variety of evidence-based research or sociological perspectives. This question was answered in many different ways, but the most successful answers used a wide range of contemporary and relevant evidence which was clearly evaluated. However, some candidates offered descriptive accounts of theoretical ideas. Whilst it was entirely acceptable for candidates to present these ideas, success was measured by the effectiveness of their discussion of these ideas which required the clear use of empirical evidence. Some candidates answered this as a question about whether diversity was increasing or spent much of the essay describing different family types.

- 3.1** Candidates who achieved full marks demonstrated a strong understanding by providing three detailed pieces of evidence. Those who only relied on Marxist evidence, without effectively applying it to the concept of masculinity, struggled to access the higher mark bands (MB4).

- 3.2** The most successful answers integrated a variety of interactionist arguments, each well supported with evidence. Some candidates limited themselves to discussing only "labelling," which prevented them from reaching higher mark bands. Top responses effectively applied evaluation directly to the evidence, rather than simply presenting a juxtaposed view.

- 3.2** Responses to this question were mixed. Stronger answers effectively utilised Postmodernist theory and relevant evaluative evidence to achieve full marks. Weaker answers primarily focused on Marxist evidence to assert the existence of "spectacular cultures," often failing to provide counter-arguments beyond the example of gang culture.

Section C

Here the topic of Education was by far the most popular option with approximately 80% selecting these questions.

- 4.1** This was an accessible question. However, there was a great deal of difference in the quality of responses, depending on the complexity of the answers and the range of evidence provided. Most candidates used two or three theoretical perspectives, most commonly Marxism, Functionalism and Feminism. The New Right and Postmodernism was used by some candidates, although not always as successfully, and often with less evidence.

Candidates are advised to read the question/command very carefully to ensure they discuss views (plural) and provide a range of contemporary evidence to support the views given.

- 4.2** This was a popular question, and many candidates answered it well, although it is worth noting that the term gender does not mean female. Many answers exclusively described the impact of femininity on the educational outcomes of girls, but the best answers also explored ideas about masculinity and the impact on the education of boys. Anti-school subcultures were often discussed well with reference to gender and educational attainment. The most successful answers explored the relative significance of factors affecting the educational achievement of females and males. Some candidates referred to transgender candidates here too.
- 4.3** This question required an assessment of the impact of poverty, and evaluative ideas came from in-school factors around labelling and self-fulfilling prophecy and/or gender and ethnicity. The most successful answers evaluated with a range of in-school, cultural, ethnicity and gender issues. The least successful answers were very descriptive accounts of theories and theorists' accounts of poverty. This often resulted in a juxtaposed essay which adversely affected the AO3 mark. Where evaluation is merely a descriptive account of alternative ideas, the AO3 mark is likely to be towards the bottom of band 3. One issue of note is that some candidates' work became quite list-like, but did not adequately link briefly mentioned studies to educational impact, so for example listing overcrowding at home or poor nutrition as relevant factors but with little link to how these adversely affected educational outcomes.
- 5.1** This question elicited a broad range of answers. Many candidates successfully accessed MB4 by discussing ethnicity and age, both supported by evidence. Where candidates did not achieve MB3 or MB4, they typically relied on examples of discrimination in media stories without incorporating sociological evidence or explanations. It is important to note that while women are still represented differently in the media, they do not constitute a minority group in the sociological sense, and candidates using this example received limited marks.

- 5.2** Overall, there were some strong answers to this question. Candidates demonstrated good knowledge regarding female representation and were able to apply this effectively. However, many answers included juxtaposed evaluation.
- 5.3** Some candidates based their answers purely on media ownership and News UK (Rupert Murdoch's company), which indicated a basic understanding of media control. The strongest answers incorporated more up-to-date evidence and included arguments surrounding cultural hegemony.
- 6.1** Very few centres studied this option.

This question generated a range of responses from very detailed to very limited. Responses that were rewarded with high marks presented at least two reasons which were supported with evidence. Whilst secularisation in general was an acceptable answer, some candidates exclusively discussed secularisation as a general phenomenon in society and seemed to ignore the part of the question which asked about younger age groups.

- 6.2** The least popular of the two extended essays.

Some candidates focused on rates of religiosity globally rather than focusing on ethnic groups within the UK, but there was some excellent knowledge about patterns of migration and religious diversity as well as religion as form of cultural defence and response to racism.

It is worth noting that this question was about ethnicity, not about ethnic minority and so white levels of religiosity was also relevant to this debate,

- 6.3** The most popular religion essays.

Many candidates successfully assessed the importance of religion by reference to the debates around secularisation / views of flourishing NAM and NRM. Others focused more on theoretical views of the importance of religion, most commonly Marxist and Functionalist. The highest achieving held an evaluative tone throughout and often discussed this in terms of numbers of those with a faith and theoretical debates. Where essays had a descriptive tone, access to the highest mark band for AO3 was more difficult.

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COMPONENT 2 – METHODS OF SOCIOLOGICAL ENQUIRY

Overview of the Component

This component assesses research methods, and all 3 assessment objectives are assessed across the paper. There are two questions, with the first question made up of three parts. Candidates are required to answer both questions. It is important candidates are reminded of the demands of each question as the item needs to be referred to in each part of question 1, studies are only needed in Q1.3 and reference to the item is not required in question 2.

The two five-mark questions were comparable to previous years in terms of difficulty and quality of the responses. However, Q1.3 was considerably weaker than previous years as candidates failed to include studies that used more than one method and instead listed different types of methods, therefore failing to recognise the holistic nature of using multiple methods. This was illustrated by an almost 2-mark drop in the mean for this question.

Responses to Q2 saw some improvement in terms of contextualising responses to the brief in the question. However, throughout the assessment, some answers failed to utilise the methodological language in the specification and therefore, could only offer basic responses.

Comments on individual questions/sections

- 1.1** Top band answers were able to define the term representative sample (weaker answers ignored sample and just explained representative), use methodological language such as target population and generalise, and could utilise the item in a meaningful way e.g. by referring to the large sample used. Some candidates failed to use the item and therefore lost AO2 marks. Many candidates simply copied the item instead of using it as an opportunity to show off additional knowledge. A significant number of candidates referred to other research with many using the census as an example which isn't an example of a sample since everyone is studied. Using studies isn't required in this question and where they were included, it meant that candidates didn't have time to refer to the item in any depth.
- 1.2** Top band answers could state one reason and explain using methodological language such as track long term change and explain how this is appropriate for the topic in the item. They were also able to contextualise the item (this is why there are more marks for AO2 than the previous 5-mark question) and explain why the researchers in the item decided to use longitudinal studies rather than giving a generic answer (without contextualising to the people/topic in the item). As with the previous question, some candidates wasted valuable time by referring to other research. There is no need to refer to other sociological studies and in fact candidates often did so to the detriment of using the item and/or developing the possible reason they had identified. A few candidates identified more than one possible reason which usually meant both were undeveloped.

- 1.3** While there was a lot of excellent answers a significant minority failed to recognise that the use of more than one method is a way of compensating for the problems of using one and instead listed different methods.

Characteristics of top band answers included: recognition that the use of more than one method helps to provide a holistic view of the group; an explanation of the principals of methodological pluralism/triangulation/the realist approach; considered the benefits of obtaining both quantitative and qualitative data; reference to at least two studies that used more than one method, e.g. Barker, Willis or Humphreys, instead of listing individual studies; explicit strengths and weaknesses using link-words such as 'another strength...'; an explanation of concepts to show understanding; a meaningful reference to the item (some candidates relied too heavily on the item and didn't refer to other research). Some candidates failed to refer to studies that used more than one method and therefore couldn't achieve marks above the basic band.

- 2.1** Candidates are advised to spend approximately half of the time available on this question as it is worth half of the marks. The marks are allocated on the basis of 8 for AO1, that is for the research design, 10 for the way in which they justify their design in relation to the brief and being an A Level student, and a further 12 for the methodological issues the design raises, that is the impact of the research design on the quality of the research (AO3). The best answers really thought about online shopping and contextualised the topic at each stage and continually linked back to being an A level student and the limitations that gave, thereby justifying their decision-making throughout. Weaker answers were more generic and went through the motions. Basic answers simply listed what they would do without explaining why it was important. Some candidates overcomplicated their research by using multiple methods or sampling methods which made their research less feasible for an A Level student.

There are a number of key elements to a research design which candidates should be expected to address. These include:

1. Type of data. Most candidates started by stating what type of data they would collect, and the best answers would state what approach they would follow e.g. positivist or interpretivist and justify their choice in relation to what they want to find e.g. social facts or meanings and motives. Similarly, candidates would talk about the importance of a literature review but in a generic way that could be added to any scenario rather than contextualising to the brief.

2. The operationalisation of the terms in the brief. This stage is listed in the mark scheme, but some candidates failed to mention the operationalisation of concepts or did so implicitly and therefore couldn't get in the detailed band for AO1. Most candidates operationalised terms such as 'age, and 'area' and the better answers thought about online shopping in relation to attitudes either by quantifying and using Likert scales or by using qualitative methods to explore positive or negative attitudes. The best answers were able to explain why operationalising is important e.g. to reduce ambiguities/improve reliability but some failed to do this.

3. The sampling technique to be used. Most candidates used appropriate methods for A Level candidates such as opportunity or volunteer and were able to reflect on the limitations in terms of generalisability and bias. Some candidates used random sampling without mentioning how they would obtain a sampling frame or obtaining a sampling frame unethically.

The best answers were able to state their sampling method and be specific in terms of numbers/location and then identify strengths and weaknesses of their choice. Weaker responses would simply state a sampling method but not elaborate on the specifics.

4. Method. Candidates should be advised that they would find it generally easier if they chose one method and then justified it in relation to the type of data the method would enable them to collect and then used the key methodological concepts to consider the impact this would have on the quality of the research. Many started off adopting a positivist approach but would then add a few open questions to rectify some of the weaknesses of their research, but this would often contradict/undermine their initial justification of their approach as well as making their project less practical for an A Level student. The best answers were specific in what they would do and had a balance of strengths and weaknesses/problems using methodological language.

5. Ethics. Most candidates did address ethics though some more cursorily than others. Some answers went through the motions and were rehearsed but this was generally done well. The best answers linked to problems with sensitivity in relation to financial issues or addiction to online shopping and how they would offer third party support to reduce potential harm. Some candidates muddled informed consent with debriefing.

6. Practical issues. Most candidates addressed practical issues of time and money. For the most part candidates referred to the fact that they were limited in their time and money due to their status as A level candidates. The best candidates thought about their chosen method and applied this to the group they were researching, e.g. if candidates chose interviews, they recognised a need for training.

7. Key concepts. Apart from the points above, candidates must be advised that they should know and understand the meaning of the key concepts and recognise that it demonstrates a lack of understanding when they, for example, use validity and reliability in the same sentence as if they were somehow interchangeable.

Overall, it is important to note that the research design needs to be realistic for an A Level student and the best answers highlighted this explicitly.

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COMPONENT 3 - POWER AND STRATIFICATION

Overview of the Component

The paper includes a compulsory topic of social inequality in Section A and Section B consists of four optional topics from which candidates must select one. Each question is made up of a compulsory 20-mark question and two 40-mark essay questions of which candidates must answer one. The demands of the 2025 assessment were of similar difficulty to previous series.

This assessment demonstrated an improved performance compared to previous series, in relation to Question 1.1, where a greater number of candidates effectively differentiated between difference and inequality.

However, a recurring issue across the other 20-mark questions was the insufficient use of sociological evidence to support arguments, often limiting responses to lower mark bands (MB2/3). For future performance, candidates must prioritise integrating sociological studies and/or data to substantiate their claims.

In Questions 1.2 (social inequality) and 4.2 (world sociology) there was an over-reliance on a single theorist (e.g., Murray or Marx) hindering access to higher marks. Future teaching should encourage a broader application of sociological theories. When teaching case studies such as the Macpherson Report, for instance, it should be used for its evidential value regarding institutional racism, not just as a narrative. Some candidates used case studies to tell a story only rather than effectively applying them to the context of the question/debate.

Evaluation was sometimes superficial or descriptive. The most successful responses across all options demonstrated integrated and critical evaluation of different perspectives or evidence. Future teaching and learning should emphasise developing robust evaluative arguments, ensuring that candidates move beyond simply contrasting ideas to demonstrating a comprehensive understanding of the topic's complexities.

Comments on individual questions/sections

Section A

- 1.1** While there was improvement this year, some candidates continued to focus on difference rather than inequality. Candidates who effectively used evidence from education, health, and the criminal justice system were most successful in explaining class inequalities. Those who provided two supporting studies for each area often achieved full marks. Candidates who listed data of differences and no explanation for the inequality were often placed in MB2 or MB3.
- 1.2** The less popular question for Section A, but those who selected this generally performed well. Some candidates limited their marks for AO1 by only referencing Murray. The best answers effectively used Marxism, feminism and functionalism to evaluate the New Right.

- 1.3** A common limitation was the exclusive use of Marxism for this question, focusing solely on class as the source of power and status. This restricted access to the top of MB3 and MB4 due to a limited perspective. The highest marks were awarded to those who incorporated Weberian studies with strong evaluation from Marxism and other theories. Some candidates also described class, power, and status without applying them to inequalities, which limited their AO2 marks.

Section B

Crime and Deviance was by far the most popular option in this section with more than 80% selecting to answer Q2. World Sociology was the next most popular with approximately 10% selecting Q5. Both Health and Disability (Q3) and Power and Politics (Q4) were chosen by a very small number of candidates.

- 2.1** Some candidates did not use evidence specific to ethnicity or policing, instead using studies like Becker or Chambliss. While marks were awarded, these responses did not access the higher mark bands. Additionally, some candidates who mentioned the Macpherson Report described the story of Stephen Lawrence rather than the evidence it provides for institutional racism. Candidates who provided no evidence were often placed in MB2. This year, a significant number of candidates achieved full marks by providing three detailed pieces of evidence, explained within the context of the question.
- 2.2** This was an open question that allowed candidates to discuss both genders and their relationship with crime, including reasons, limitations, and victims. Some candidates approached this as a purely feminist question, which sometimes limited their access to MB4 for AO2 if their arguments weren't consistently applied to gender as a whole. The best answers effectively used both genders and provided relevant evaluation, rather than simply juxtaposing ideas for example, "class has a bigger relationship because...".
- 2.3** This was a very popular question. The best answers demonstrated a range of functionalist arguments with strong evaluative points. Some candidates structured their answers with a single paragraph for each of the sociological theories, describing whether they viewed crime as functional. This approach limited marks for knowledge and application due to its descriptive nature.
- 3.1** Overall, this question was answered well. Some candidates were limited to MB2 for AO1 primarily due to a lack of sociological evidence. A small number of candidates relied solely on examples from the media without any sociological support.
- 3.2** Few candidates answered this question, those who did were often able to discuss material factors of health including education. However, they were not always able to effectively evaluate these factors.
- 3.3** The more popular question this year in this option. A number of candidates described how health is a social construction and did not evaluate this which restricted their marks. A limited number of candidates answered this well and accessed MB4.
- 4.1** Some candidates wrote about what different sociological theories might think or gave examples of different pressure groups but did not support their points with evidence, which limited their answers to MB2, as this was an evidence-based question.

- 4.2** This was the more popular essay from Option 3, though still few candidates chose this option. Answers were mixed; some candidates only used Karl Marx as their Marxist evidence. Other candidates did not perform well in AO3 due to their evaluation being merely juxtaposed rather than integrated. The best answers used a range of Marxist evidence.
- 4.3** Very few candidates answered this question. Those who did, generally performed exceptionally well, providing excellent answers that used relevant evidence and evaluated it in depth with modern examples.
- 5.1** This question was generally answered poorly, with very few candidates providing sufficient evidence. This is reflected in the mean mark, 8.7, the lowest of all the 20-mark questions in the assessment. More detailed evidence was particularly needed concerning gender and inequality. Candidates who performed well on this question effectively supported their points with both evidence and examples.
- 5.2 and 5.3** Many responses to these questions relied heavily on juxtaposition, often simply stating contrasting theories (e.g., "Parsons said this, Wallerstein said that"). Unfortunately, the use of real-life examples was limited, despite the abundance of relevant material available. Candidates who excelled in these questions adopted an evaluative tone, incorporated real-life examples, and consistently linked their arguments back to the question throughout their answers.

Supporting you

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